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SUBJECT: ELECTORAL EUPHORIA IN EGYPT

¶1. (U) Summary and comment: Both publicly and privately, Egyptians are over the moon with the results of the U.S. presidential election. From the front pages of daily newspapers to popular TV shows to smiling people in the street, the excitement is palpable. The peaceful transfer of power was particularly appreciated here, and the sense that "America is back," is ubiquitous. As many observers have already noted to us, the hard part will be managing expectations: How will President-elect Obama and his new administration live up to the impossibly high expectations of Egyptians? Nonetheless, the clear verdict of the nearly thousand Egyptians who came to our election party and celebrated throughout the night: the U.S. elections were the single most potent and effective promotion of democracy imaginable. End summary and comment.

¶2. (U) Everyone in Egypt, it seems, from hard-bitten businessmen to frustrated political activists, is thrilled with what happened on November 4th; first, by the spectacle of the American presidential election, and second, with the results. Telephone calls from official GoE contacts have been many and universally positive: "Congratulations on your new president!" is the exuberant refrain. As one prominent American-Egyptian businessman put it: "I am not a Democrat, but I certainly feel like one today!" Another Egyptian business contact, a senior banking executive, told us that over the past two years, he had become completely disillusioned with America and its role in the Middle East. With tears in his eyes, he confessed to our Econ Counselor, "My faith has been restored." President-elect Obama's return telephone call to President Mubarak was publicly noted and appreciated.

¶3. (U) In the media, the news of President-elect Obama's victory has been broad and positive, and has dominated television news and talk show programs, as well as the front, inside and editorial pages of every major publication in Egypt. During the Embassy-hosted election night party, two television stations broadcast the Ambassador's statements on the election live and many others broadcast interviews the next morning.

¶4. (U) Aside from factual reporting of the Obama victory, there have been three overarching themes in local media coverage. The first is that the election symbolized change and the end of racism in the U.S. In the pro-government Al Ahram, Egypt's most circulated newspaper, the lead editorial read, "the wish of millions of Americans and many nations around the world came true! America proved it is capable of change and evolution by crossing over barriers of racism and discrimination." Writing in Egypt's leading independent newspaper Al Masry Al Youm, columnist Seliman Gouda wrote, "Several senior Egyptian figures were divided about who would win the U.S. elections. Even in the U.S., some analysts doubted the victory of Obama. Apparently, no one has realized the scope of the change in American society."

¶5. (U) The second theme that has emerged, but only in the independent press, is that the election draws a sharp

contrast to the electoral process in Egypt. In Al Masry Al Youm, columnist Belal Fadl wrote, "A U.S. election) and any election in the world) exposes our deficiency, but these U.S. elections have been the harshest on our situation." Many observers lauded John McCain's grace in defeat and the peaceful transfer of power from President Bush to President-elect Obama. For example, in the independent Al Dustour newspaper, columnist Ibrahim Mansour wrote, "they made a change after 8 years of Bush's catastrophic era. Did our rulers learn anything from that event? When the majority and other political forces in the US called for a change they were not accused of working against the nation."

¶6. (U) The third theme has been the expression of doubt that an Obama administration will really bring change to American foreign policy in the Middle East. Writing in Al Ahram, Egypt's leading columnist Salama Ahmed Salama wrote, "As for the Middle East, he (Obama) is not expected to step in early in his term and risk the anger of the Zionist lobby...The Middle East will remain as it is and any change that does not come from within is doomed to fail." Columnist Mahmoud Nafie in the independent Nahdet Masr wrote, "the important, nave question we ask after each American Election is: what does the new President have for the Arabs? Obama came, and Bush departed, but Arabs do not learn the lesson that from the White House, they have been bitten one time after another, and another."

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